



(From left) Madam Linda Lim Sor Bee, 70, Madam Tan Quee Choo, 66, Ms Clara Ong Jing Hui, 21, and Madam Chow Li Chin, 64, posing for a fun shot while waiting out the rain at Fort Siloso. By the second day, there were no signs of shyness between the seniors and the students. For many participants, the newfound friendships were what they cherished most. ST PHOTOS: SONG TAO

# No ordinary school camp

They never got the chance to go to university, but last month, 31 seniors got a taste of campus life – thanks to a camp organised by the People's Association and NUS



Song Tao  
Photojournalist

At the National University of Singapore's (NUS) College of Alice and Peter Tan two Saturday nights ago, campers huddled around a campfire to sing Mandopop singer Emil Chau's "Friends".

Given the warmth and camaraderie, it was hard to imagine that many had met only three days ago. The three-day event held from June 22 to 24 was no ordinary university camp – many participants were not only married but also parents or even grandparents. But like any university freshman at an orientation camp, the 31 senior citizens taking part were experiencing university life for the first time.

A group of 19 NUS students from the College of Alice and Peter Tan served as buddies to the seniors, in the second time that such a residential camp was held.

A joint project between the People's Association's Senior Academy programme and students from the college, it aims to encourage lifelong learning and expand seniors' social circles by encouraging inter-generational bonding.

During the camp, young and old got to know one another better through ice-breakers, classes and even an outing. For retiree Koh Poo Tin, 76, the camp was a good chance to continue learning.

She said: "In the past, I did not have the opportunity to study until I was 10 and even then, I could study until only Primary 5... Now that I am older, I do not have to worry about housework or my children, and I finally have time to learn new things." One class Madam Koh attended was an introductory Korean language lesson.

Student facilitator Andrea Chiew, 21, said: "Sometimes we take learning for granted because we go to school every day. Even though the Korean lesson was difficult, the elderly never gave up... They wanted to make use of the full two hours to learn something."

Besides attending classes, the seniors also played childhood games such as pick-up sticks and chapteh. And their spirits were not dampened though it rained during their Fort Siloso outing. Unable to explore the open-air exhibits, they visited the museum instead.

Student organiser Daniel Tan, 24, said he was impressed by the seniors' passion for learning. "Their hunger for learning is really, really strong," he added.

Dr Tan Lai Yong, resident fellow and director of outreach and community engagement at College of Alice and Peter Tan, said the camp was designed to bring people of different backgrounds together. "The seniors have knowledge, wisdom, insight and experiences. It will be our loss if (we) don't spend time listening to them," he said.

For many participants, the newfound friendships were what they cherished most. At the end of the camp, retired teacher Yow Sen Heng, 75, said: "Our generation has become a little detached from society. I have gained much from an opportunity to learn and mix with the younger generation."

songtao@sph.com.sg



En route to Sentosa island, the seniors broke out in smiles as they looked forward to exploring Fort Siloso. For some of these seniors who lived through World War II, Fort Siloso was the perfect place for them to share some stories of their youth with the younger students.



The downpour did not dampen the spirits of the energetic Yow Sin Hong, 65, and Michelle Quek Jia Min, 20, as they ran out of the rain and into the tunnels of Fort Siloso to continue exploring the museum.



During a tour of the University Town campus on day one, the seniors shared with the students their amazement at the different amenities that the campus had to offer. For the three-day event, the seniors were split into smaller groups of six, with each group facilitated by three to four students from NUS.



(From left) Madam Yow Sen Heng, 75, Madam Chow Li Chin, 64, and Madam Lee Siew Lian, 52, trying to learn a dance with help from Mr Bernard Chua Kian Liang, 22, during a "campfire".



Madam Lim Kim Thuay, 62, trying out a game of pool for the first time during a tour of the campus. In trying to satisfy their curiosity, many of the seniors joined the camp to get a better understanding of the life that university students lead.



On the first night of the camp, the students challenged the seniors to old-time childhood games like chapteh, kuti-kuti and pick-up sticks. To liven up the atmosphere further, the camp organisers held an impromptu paper plane throwing contest.



To cap off the camp, the students organised a "campfire" made of crepe paper for the seniors.

#### TIME IS RIGHT

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MADAM KOH POO TIN, 76, who attended a Korean language class.

#### KEEN TO LEARN

Sometimes we take learning for granted because we go to school every day... Looking at the elderly, even though the Korean lesson was difficult, they never gave up... They wanted to make use of the full two hours to learn something.



STUDENT FACILITATOR ANDREA CHIEW, 21.



Seniors were given a smartphone photography class where they learnt some techniques and practised taking selfies. The seniors of PA's Senior Academy showed how tech-savvy they were, even setting up and creating WhatsApp chat groups with students on the first day.



Madam Mildred Kan Yuet Yue, 66, saying goodbye to student facilitator Andrea Chiew, 21, with an embrace on the last day of the camp.